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A Qualitative Analysis of the Experiences of Black Undergraduate Males at Predominantly Black and White Institutions

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This research is a product of the graduate program in [College Student Affairs](#) at Eastern Illinois University.

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Abstract

This present study was designed to explore some of the issues and differences of African American males on the campuses of predominantly black and predominantly white institutions. The research closely examined the academic experiences of African American males and the similarities and differences in their co-curricular experience. In addition this study examined some of the major obstacles to survival within the college environment specifically and issues regarding the retention and attrition of African American males.

The data collected for this study were obtained through the use of an interactive qualitative inquiry method. The study was phenomenological in design. The findings in this study revealed that the issues of African American males differed in various areas depending upon the type of school they attended being predominantly White or Predominantly Black. The main area discussed appeared to be academics from males attending the predominantly White institution. They revealed problems with academic advisement as opposed to the problem on predominantly Black institutions being seen as academic instruction and communication. Other Areas discussed were academic motivation, academic attention, employment, student organizations, obstacles, and retention and attrition.

Emerging from the findings were other issues related to African American males that were not directly related to this research. These areas were identified by the interviewees while discussing other matters they felt were important such as peers, diversity, administrative support, and stereotypes.

Limitations were made from this study as well as recommendations that would further encourage others to extend research on African American males in this and other areas.

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Introduction

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

*Ralph Ellison
The Invisible Man, p.3*

Research on African American men in U.S. institutions of higher education is extensive; unfortunately, this literature focuses primarily on problems of crime, violence, drugs, teenage pregnancy, and poor academic achievement (Hrabowsk, Maton, & Greif, 1998). One in every four African American men are in jail or under some type of court supervision; there are more black men who have reached their twenties in jail than there are black men enrolled in college (Gill, 1991).

Research on the experience of African American students in higher education has concentrated primarily on two areas: (1) the differential experience of these students relative to white students, and (2) the differential effects of attending a predominantly white institution as opposed to a historically black one. Very little work has focused on the variations in the gender experiences of African American students. The existing research generally focused on the declining participation and increased attrition rates of African American males in higher education (Green & Wright, 1992), while paying scant attention to the qualitative aspects of these students' schooling experiences (Davis, 1994,p. 620).

The literature on African American male and female college students who attend predominantly white institutions suggest that these students do not do as well as their

white counterparts in persistence rates, academic achievement, postgraduate study, and overall psychosocial adjustments (Allen, Epps, & Haniff; 1991; Astin, 1982; Fleming 1984).

Although African American female college students who attend white schools suffer from some of the same issues as do black males (i.e., problems with faculty, staff, and peers), African American females manage to gain something more from the academic experience. African American women generally attend college in greater numbers than African American men and thus, in comparison to all other ethnic groups, African American students have the lowest male to female ratio (Cuyjet, 1997).

Over the past twenty-five years, the African American institutional enrollment pattern has shifted, resulting in more African Americans enrolling in predominantly white rather than predominantly black colleges and universities (Allen, 1987). African American students at predominantly white institutions sometimes experience racial insensitivity, hostility, and discrimination perpetrated by different types of campus personnel as well as off campus shopkeepers and police officers (Feagin, Vera & Imani, 1996). Black males in white colleges do not feel warmly received or secure in the comfort of many relationships and are unable to maintain controlled feelings of detachment. Most likely, their feelings of being surrounded by a perceived hostile environment create barriers to fulfilling needs for friendship and intimacy (Fleming, 1984).

African American male and female students on black campuses have more recurrent social interactions with peers, become more involved on campus, and maintain a positive relationship with faculty members (Fleming, 2001). According to Allen

(1992), black students who attend HBCU's experience educational, social, and personal identity benefits beyond what white institutions can provide to minority students.

These benefits are manifested in "positive psychological adjustments", more significant academic gains, and greater cultural awareness/commitment than Black students on white campuses... Thus the 'fit' between African American male and female students and higher education seem to be more favorable on historically Black campuses than on predominantly white campuses (Allen, 1992, p.32).

On black campuses, African American males and females emphasize feelings of engagement, connection, acceptance and extensive support and encouragement (Allen, 1992).

Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the similarities and differences in the collegiate experiences of selected African American males attending a predominantly white institution in the Midwest and a predominantly black institution in the Mid-south. This research examined their collegiate experience in the areas of socialization, academic performance, involvement in the co-curriculum, and retention and attrition behaviors.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the academic experiences of African American males on a predominantly white campus versus a predominantly black campus?

- 2) What are some of the similarities and differences, if any, in the co-curricular experience of Black males attending predominantly Black versus predominantly White colleges?
- 3) What are some of the obstacles to survival within the college environment that black males experience?
- 4) What are some of the issues surrounding retention and attrition related to the black male collegiate experience?

Significance of the Study

African Americans are usually underrepresented at every educational level, but mainly at the college level (McJamerson, 1989). Although African Americans have been enrolling in college in small numbers for over one hundred years, the opportunity to enroll within the university of their choice has only been freely available within the last three to four decades (Gilliard, 1996). Historically, there were few mainstream educational opportunities for African American males with the exception of historically black institutions established by abolitionists for non-slaves (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Currently, educational opportunities for black males have expanded due to decades of litigation and legislation (Brown, 1999). Little research, however, has been conducted about the experiences of African American men from a qualitative perspective (Davis, 1994). Qualitative research on African American males is important because it permits their personal experiences to be heard from their point of view.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to two focus groups of three participants each. The participants consisted of one group of men who were enrolled at a historically black college and another group who were enrolled at a predominantly white college. The study conveys the experiences of only those students who participated in the focus groups. Results cannot be generalized to all colleges or to the experiences of other African American male students.

Operational Definitions

The following terms provide operational definitions for the purposes of this study.

HBCU- Historically black colleges and universities founded primarily in the southeastern United States after the Civil War established for the newly freed slaves of African descent.

Microaggressions-“subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solarzano & Yosso, 2000, p.60)

PWIs- Predominantly White Institutions are colleges and universities “in which the majority of the student population is composed of white (Anglo) students and has been throughout the history of the institution” (Wallace, 1993)

Co-curricular – Out-of-class activities associated with the college experience

Overview

The study is comprised of five separate chapters. Chapter II provides a theoretical overview of the African American male experiences in higher education and serves as a review of the current and pertinent literature. Chapter III outlines the methodology of the

study. Chapter IV contains the results of data collection. Chapter V includes a discussion, recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

The literature on black males tends to focus on skills needed to survive and in many cases thrive and succeed in a frequently oppressive American society. Many of the studies concentrate on how Black men handle urban life and the negative attributes associated with it, such as drugs, crime, homicide, prison, discrimination, school drop out, etc. There are also studies that address issues related to culture and how black males adjust to living in America, both from a historical and present day perspective, and their alienation from mainstream society due to the perils of urban life. With this in mind, some writers have been led to conclude that black males are an endangered species (Majors & Gordon, 1994)

Research on African American Male College Students

The significant research conducted thus far focuses on African Americans in general and seldom distinguishes between the experiences of men and women. Researchers have suggested there are differences among African American men and women in academic performance, socialization, retention rates, enrollment patterns, etc. (Fleming, 1984; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991). Black males must also manage differing academic expectations between families (high) and institutions (low), a task made more difficult by their unfamiliarity with campus culture. These differences in academic expectations and familiarity with college culture are not necessarily unique to African American males, but they are significant to the analysis of what African American males in general go through as the college experience evolves.

Many African American men struggle with academics due to lack of preparation for college, which becomes an increasing problem as they move through the college years (Davis, 1999). The deficit in public school-related academic abilities and performance among many African American males has contributed to their inability to master crucial developmental tasks in childhood and adolescence. Lee (1991) suggested that their failure to thrive was due to their lack of the skills necessary to succeed in the academic environment.

African American males on predominantly White college campuses also struggle with socialization issues that impede their ability to succeed on campus. Their struggle to acquire personal identity is made more difficult by the very nature of some campuses. For instance, Cross (1991) stated that the concept known as Psychological Nigrescence referred to an experience where the individual attempts to resocialize, "to transform a preexisting identity (a non Afrocentric identity) into one that is Afrocentric"(p.203). Cross proposed that the person immerses himself or herself in the world of blackness. Black students entering college life may seek out immersion experiences such as the Black campus union or historically Black fraternities or sororities, and resist those elements of college life that appear to reflect White values. Unfortunately, many predominantly White college campuses make this immersion into blackness difficult and ignore the needs of students.

A socialization issue faced by Black males is the lack of positive Black role models on predominantly White college campuses. Schunk (1996) reviewed a wealth of research suggesting that exposing students to supportive adult and peer models can have a positive affect on self-efficacy for learning and performing tasks. The lack of role

models makes gaining a sense of belonging and significance more difficult for African American males, and raises the need for developing a more diverse academic culture within PWIs. Current culture on PWI campuses results in African American males attempting to become socially accepted by interacting with peers who are better integrated within their community of scholars but who do not themselves perform well academically. Thus, confined in this uncertain environment, they create a comfort zone for themselves insulated from the academic mainstream.

Despite the fact that there was an overall increase in the enrollment of African American males in college during the 1990's, African American men still only make up about 37% of all African Americans enrolled in higher education (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1996). Between 1990 and 2002, the enrollment rate of African American males increased by only 14.6% (Davis, 1999). Overall, African American males account for 3.5 percent of total college enrollment. However, they are disproportionately represented among students who are forced to withdraw, and those with relatively lower academic performance and who report generally negative college experiences (Carter & Wilson, 1997).

According to Polite and Davis (1999), the exclusive study of African Americans males' experiences in college and related achievement and social outcomes has a very limited place in the academic literature, with very few researchers attempting to link the social meanings of gender with schooling and social outcomes.

To provide assistance to this cadre of African American men, college and university administrators should concern themselves both with providing a nonthreatening environment for black men in a serious effort for the entire

campus community, including black men themselves, to dispel certain stereotypes. Because black men and black women are different in some important ways, these efforts to assist black men on the campus may have to include some special elements that apply to the needs of men alone (Cuyjet, 1990, p. 14-15).

Fleming (1984) found that Black males reported experiencing more negative feelings and unhappiness about college life, felt they were often unfairly mistreated, experienced academic demoralization, and thought less of their academic ability than did Black women or their non-Black counterparts. "African American male college students are concerned about the negative stereotyping that overshadows their genuine identity as intelligent, young, black men on the rise" (Dawson-Threat, 1997, p.35).

However, there is general evidence that the impact of academics, retention, and socialization on black students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU's) is more positive than that found at predominantly White colleges. This phenomenon may vary according to the unique nature and history of each institution (Fleming, 2001).

When African Americans are at White institutions they tend to become more aware of themselves and who they are as a person. In addition, there is a sense of appreciation and a bond that forms with other African American students at predominantly White colleges because of the lack of diversity, specifically the presence of other African American students (Epps, 1971). Therefore, African Americans do not feel as comfortable on PWI campuses as they do on predominantly Black campuses.

On predominantly white campuses, black students emphasize feelings of alienation, sensed hostility, racial discrimination, and lack of integration. On historically black campuses, black students emphasize feelings of engagement,

connection, acceptance, and extensive support and encouragement. Consistent with accumulated evidence on human development, these students like most human beings, develop best in environments where they feel valued, protected, accepted, and socially connected. The supportive environments of historically black colleges communicate to black students that it is safe to take the risk associated with intellectual growth and development. Such environments also have more people who provide black students with positive feedback, support, and understanding, and who communicate that they care about students' welfare (Tatum, 1999, p.79-80).

Solorzano & Yosso (2000) used focus groups, including male and female African American students, to illustrate that a relationship exists between racial micoraggressions and the campus racial climate. The study concluded that African American students in predominantly white universities appear to suffer from a sense of discouragement, frustration, and exhaustion all resulting from racial microaggressions.

Obstacles to Success for African American Males on College Campuses

The overall number of White students attending college has increased in the past decade, but the number of Black males attending college has steadily declined. This decrease in Black male college attendance can be due to several factors such as 1) elementary and secondary school environments having low expectations for African American boys, 2) the hazardous environments for boys in the age range of 6-15 years old, 3) federal financial aid which has moved from grants to loans as the main form of assistance in college, 4) increased entry requirements for college, 5) a lack of comprehensive programs by colleges and universities designed to recruit and retain

African American males other than in athletics, 6) an increasing homicide rate among African American men, particularly between the ages of 20-24, and 7) the reaction of a societal structure whereby one of every four African American men are in jail or under court supervision (Gill, 1991).

Lee (1996) identified additional barriers to college such as lack of full benefit to education opportunities and societal promotion, one of the lowest life expectancies in the country, high homicide rates currently stated as the leading cause of death, and few role models in the community due to endemic incarceration. With these obstacles in mind, no wonder Black men struggle with basic needs such as health, safety issues, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging and significance. The lack of having basic body, security, and social needs met (Maslow, 1970) in turn makes pursuit of higher order ego needs such as advanced education like college especially difficult.

Once African American male students are admitted to college, they often encounter different problems than white students that can hinder their development and success. This hindrance can be attributed to several reasons: problems of social and financial insecurity, interracial dating, and racial stereotypes to name a few. Their experiences in college have become a chief issue and a challenge for many institutions of higher education (Dawson-Threat, 1997).

According to Ross, (1998), African American males who pursue college need to experience a sense of nurturing in order to assist them in overcoming obstacles.

Nuturing is at the center of the young black male's ability to survive and overcome his obstacles, many of which are a part of his daily environment. When

a young black male is nurtured by a significant person in his life, that creates in him the capability to persist (p.66).

One response to the need for nurturing among college Black males is the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) (Bledsoe, 1991, <http://www.2cusaab.org>). The purpose of SAAB is to “embrace the principles of accountability, proactive leadership, self-discipline, and intellectual development” (<http://www.2cusaab.org/smission.htm>) to foster the collegiate success of African American males.

Socialization of African American Males

Fries-Britt (1997) stated that media and popular culture has reinforced constricting stereotypes on African Americans through use of images repeated continually. It is no surprise then that college officials and faculty members have skewed ideas about African American students. These distorted perceptions can result in faulty assumptions about black students' academic and social needs.

The images created of Black men in our society often confine them to environments shaped by drugs, crime, athletics, and academic failure. In education, we have contributed to this negative portrait by the disproportionate amount of research that emphasizes remediation and disadvantage (p.65).

Fleming (1984) noted that black males tend to avoid faculty and instead concentrate on participating in classroom activities and/or learn by other means than through interaction with the professor.

Black males on black campuses exhibit behavioral profiles that are indistinguishable from those of white males. Though they are sometimes disenchanted with the classroom atmosphere, they maneuver around their

dissatisfaction by forming informal attachments to faculty and by participating in extra classroom activities. They experience cognitive growth as well as release of their assertive energies. Their competitive abilities improve as they come to enjoy competition and find expression for their power motivation in black settings. In short, they display a social and intellectual ascendance that looks like great fun (p.142).

Davis (1994) found that African American students on predominantly white campuses do participate in extracurricular campus activities, but on historically black college campuses, African American students participate in activities more frequently. The results also showed that on Black college campuses, African American students feel better about themselves because they have encouraging relationships with their peers and everything on campus is focused around, designed, and operated exclusively toward the needs of African American students.

When African Americans are at predominantly White colleges, they tend to become more self-critically aware of themselves and who they are as a person. There is also a sense of appreciation for and an insular social bond that forms with other African American students. This insularity is due primarily to the dearth of African American students on PWI campuses with which to identify and validate oneself (Epps, 1971). The more multicultural predominantly White college campuses give African American students the opportunity to learn from a number of students of different backgrounds and combine these experiences with experiences of their own (Epps, 1971),

African American students feel threatened on predominantly white campuses since their status as a minority is significant and therefore they feel a sense of alienation

from their White peers (Dawson-Threat, 1997). Many Black men perceive campus life on predominantly White college campuses as hostile, and as a result they perceive the student organizations on these campuses as unwelcoming. Thus, they tend not to attempt to participate as leaders even though there is open membership.

Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) found that even though PWI's have become more diverse, there is still trivial minority student involvement within campus student organizations. The results of their study revealed that black students perceived themselves as leaders regardless of whether or not they held an elected position within a campus organization. The study also revealed that Blacks attending HBCU's were more involved in academic clubs and honor societies than were black men in PWI's.

Social Support Systems for African American Males

According to Wright and McCreary (1997), to successfully negotiate the challenges inherent to pursuing higher education, African American males need a support system within the institution. For the African American male college student there is an unspoken authorization to endure every challenge, and to shoulder the responsibilities that come with representing the potential of their race.

The few studies in this area have found that African American males gain more socially and academically at historically Black colleges (Davis, 1999). "Social support has been shown to have significant consequences for educational outcomes, but there has been little attention given to differential experiences of African American males in college" (p.140). African American males receive more social support at historically black colleges and universities than do other African American males at predominantly White institutions.

Gloria, Robinson, Hamilton, and Willison (1999) found that higher levels of social support, more comfort in the university environment, and positive self-beliefs were associated with academic social persistence decisions of African American undergraduate students in a predominantly white institution. Other research (Cuyjet, 1997, Bledsoe, Rome, & Cuyjet, 2003) has indicated that support groups for African American students help to improve perceptions of the university environment, establish social supports, and strengthen self-beliefs.

Tatum (1999) spoke of how he felt isolated as an undergraduate at his institution. He compared his experience at his undergraduate institution to that of a Chinese immigrant, white girl, or white boy attending an elementary school and high school with people of the same gender and same ethnicity for 16 years and then suddenly finding themselves on a “lonely island in college, standing as the last pin trying to resist the weeble and wobble so as not to fall down (p.63).” The author commented:

I imagine this contemplated scenario would be difficult for that Chinese immigrant or white boy, or white girl. However, this scenario is not one of contemplation for the African American male who experiences social and cultural alienation at many major institutions. It gets lonely, and the weight of being the sole representative of blackness and maleness is cumbersome (p.63).

Tatum expressed frustration with his experience:

Sometimes I feel like Huck Finn on the riverbank, or Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, trying to survive in a society that was foreign to his well-being-not knowing how to react to his existence, or trying to escape the "invisibility" that Ralph Ellison articulated so eloquently (p.63).

One of the factors that are critical to the black male having a supportive college experience is having a positive faculty relationship. Cuyjet (1997) emphasized that, “faculty relationships are known to have a critical effect on whether black male students are marginalized or embraced in the college environment” (p.94). Faculty relationships or interactions are an integral part of positive social support systems for African American males on campus. Another form of social support for African American males is a mentor.

Application of mentoring proves to be an affective tool in providing the support necessary to overcome the barriers that prevent many African American men from successfully completing college. Mentoring is vital in contributing to the survival and empowering of African American men, and it also enhances their ability to make plausible gains in the higher education milieu (LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997, p. 52).

Academic Performance

Davis (1994) addressed two major questions, one dealing with the differences of African Americans males who attend predominantly black versus predominantly white institutions and the other question related to the academic success of the two groups. He concluded that different racial environments could affect academic achievement, and that determinants of academic success could vary in predominantly white and predominantly black institutions.

The academic achievement of African American men can depend on the kind of college they attend and can be influenced by cultural stereotypes. “Examination of research findings reveals that academic achievement related to African American men in

college can be affected by the college's racial environment and whether they are attending a White or Black college" (Dawson-Threat, 1997, p.31). Gifted Black men are often stereotyped as "acting like they are White" (Fries-Britt, 1997, p.68) because often people unthinkingly put whites in the category of having academic excellence and intellectual pursuits, but Blacks in an "at risk" box with low performance and lesser aspirations. Due to institutionalized stereotypes, African American male college students are not often thought of as being academically talented or gifted. However, when serious efforts are made to identify and nurture Black men's actual intellectual abilities, students of the highest academic capability emerge (Cuyjet, 1997).

Black males in white colleges can go through a "state of behavior" (Fleming, 1984, p. 142) that can make them become depressed about college life.

They become unhappy with college life. They feel that they have been treated unfairly. They display academic demotivation and think less of their abilities. They profess losses of energy and cease to be able to enjoy competitive activities. To be sure, there are ways in which these males do not act depressed, inasmuch as they become assertive and may participate energetically in certain campus activities. Nonetheless, these developments are defensive and do little to remedy their plight (Fleming, 1984, p.142).

Most Black students at historically black colleges have higher grade point averages than Blacks at predominantly White colleges, but are often displeased with the conditions of the school. Blacks also receive more academic and emotional support at Black institutions and as a result perform at higher levels (Davis, 1999).

Many African American males at PWI's feel that their interaction with professors and White peers have been negative and as a result, attempt to avoid interacting with whites outside of the classroom (Davis, 1999). Fleming (1984) found that African American males attending predominantly white institutions appear to experience the stages of student development at a slower pace than do other students. Black males who attended white colleges tend to have parents who are slightly better educated than Black males who attend Black schools. The parents of Black males who attend White colleges also tend to have better jobs and live in better neighborhoods than do their Black peers at predominantly black colleges and universities (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991).

Davis (1994) found that Black males' perceptions of institutional support were not directly related to academic performance on predominantly White campuses. African American males at predominantly white institutions who had more positive perceptions about the support of the institution studied harder and had stronger peer relationships, but did not necessarily have a higher level of achievement. However, those that did have higher levels of academic integration performed better scholastically.

Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) stated many colleges and universities advise away African Americans as well as students of other racial backgrounds from certain academic disciplines, such as physical sciences or engineering; because their advisors feel they would not be able to handle the major due to the advisors holding certain negative racial assumptions and stereotypes. These students are assumed not to have the motivation and ability to take on such disciplines and are often counseled by the advisors into an easier major.

Charleston-Lyons (1998) found that males with higher grades are more concerned with academic performance, and Black males who are somewhat satisfied with their campus life tend to have more of an interest in intermingling with their peers and participating in campus activities (171).

Retention and Attrition of African American males.

According to Feagin, Vera, & Imani (1996), the problems of recruitment and retention have an effect on African American students at PWI's to a significantly greater degree than they affect white students. The authors group retention with recruitment because these two concepts form a process that students follow. Recruitment begins with self or university recruitment followed by admission to college. Then, student retention is a major issue for several years depending on the type of academic and social support the school may offer to students. The issue is that the retention rate for African American students is significantly lower than that for white students.

Making it through a predominantly white college or university becomes a personal struggle for African American students. The thoughts uppermost in Black students minds ought to be focused on academic work, not periodically ruminating about race related microaggressions that force them to question staying in school or dropping out, a serious educational roadblock not faced by students with White privilege. This problem of retention and attrition is even more challenging in those institutional racial climates that provoke thoughts of dropping out or transferring to a Black college (Feagin, Imani, & Vera 1996)

Why are PWI students considering transferring to a black college? Maybe because Black students feel the social relationships on PWI campuses are anything but

positive, and they spend valuable time retreating into the structure of Black social support systems. In many instances, universities are ignorant or unresponsive to the special needs of Black students and therefore their adjustment to college is further complicated (Fleming, 1984).

Research has shown that African Americans at predominantly white colleges and universities typically have lower grade point averages, higher attrition rates, and lower enrollments in post-graduate programs as opposed to their white peers (Nettles, 1988). They also show a decrease in achievement motivation during college when compared to their Black counterparts at predominantly Black colleges and universities (Fleming, 1984).

The inordinately high attrition rate for African American male students has become a major concern of academia, although frequently ignored due to other pressing societal issues. Attrition rates for African American male college students range for 40% to 75% among men attending predominantly White universities (Percy, 1992). Nationally only 12% of African American males who enter college actually complete requirements for a degree (Irvine, 1990). According to Lee (1991), academic abilities lacked by African American males contributed to their inability to master crucial developmental tasks in childhood and adolescence. He also suggested their failure to thrive was due to their lack of the skills necessary to succeed in the academic environment.

According to Tinto (1993), several factors contribute to student attrition. Tinto found that academic and social integration have become determinants that influence a students' decision whether to stay in school or drop out. He also found that when African

American students arrive on campus they have built in characteristics, including family backgrounds, pre-college educational achievements, academic abilities, and other various personal contributions, which may all significantly influence rates of student persistence. Some African American male students enter college socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged. Successfully mixing them into the social fabric of the institution increases the chance for them to matriculate, advance, and persist (LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997).

Summary

The review of literature has examined five primary areas of interest: obstacles to success, socialization, social support systems, academic performance, and retention and attrition. The research reveals African American males encounter numerous barriers that prohibit equal opportunity enjoyed by their white counterparts. Black males socialize more effectively on black campuses and are more prone to isolation on predominantly white campuses. Social support systems on Black campuses are more effective in providing a culture of success through positive faculty relationships, effective faculty mentoring, less isolation, and a racially comfortable environment. Academic performance was found to suffer among Black males at predominantly white institutions due to differential treatment and expectations, namely, racial stereotypes that lead to academic demotivation and lower self-efficacy. Lastly, the research revealed that because African American males enter university life socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged, more consideration must be given to better social and academic integration. This in turn will lead to increased probability of advances in persistence and matriculation.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to focus on the experiences of African American males attending a predominantly white and predominantly black institution. The two institutions included in this study were medium sized state institutions located in the Midwest. An interactive qualitative inquiry method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) was used so those who read the study will be able to read about the selected personal experiences of Black males who participated in this research. The type of qualitative study used in this research was phenomenological. A qualitative method was important in this study because little research has been done in regard to the personal experiences of African American males in terms of obstacles to their success, socialization, social support systems, academics, and retention and attrition. Using a qualitative method allows the researcher to gather very detailed information in regards to the students' experience.

A phenomenological method of study was conducted because it described the meanings of lived experience. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a description of "its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive reliving and reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (Van Manen, 1990, P.36). This research reflected the voices of six African American men based on their personal experiences.

Setting

This study took place at two medium size universities. The first university was a predominantly white comprehensive institution. The group interview took place in the

library of a department where the researcher currently is a graduate student. The interview consisted of a focus group format and lasted approximately one hour. The second group interview location was at a professional business fraternity conference. The three participants were all from the same predominantly black comprehensive institution, also located in the Midwest. A follow-up interview was also held with these students on their campus within the same week.

Subjects

Six African American males were selected to participate in the study. Five of the participants were selected at random by engaging them in conversation and asking if they would be willing to participate in the study. A sixth participant was identified by two of the other participants. Initially, a participant was selected so that the researcher could test out the research questions and practice running through the interview. Although field notes were taken on this participant, he was not invited to the focus group interview. All participants approached by the researcher agreed to take part in the focus group. They were presented with a consent form (see Appendix A), informed of the purpose for the study, and reminded that the research was voluntary, meaning they could withdraw their participation at any time. The final sample consisted of six African American undergraduate males ranging in age from 19 to 31. One was a senior, three were juniors, and two were sophomores.

Instrument

The research project consisted of conducting two separate focus group interviews. Each group was made up of three participants, one group of three was from the predominantly white campus and the other group of three was from the predominantly

Black campus. The interviews lasted around one hour in length and were based on twenty-two semi-structured interview questions determined in advance, and additional probes that emerged throughout the interviewing process. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Each participant chose his own pseudonyms and was encouraged to give in-depth responses to each question. Towards the end of the interviews respondents were allowed to add their own thoughts about things that had not been covered in the predetermined interview questions. Each set of interviews was conducted in areas that were quiet and secluded for privacy. The first and second interview was conducted in March, 2003. Interviews were conducted at the student's convenience. The semi-structured questions asked during the interview can be found in Appendix B.

Data Collection

The students selected for the sample were initially approached by the researcher in person to invite them to participate in the project. Later each member was contacted via telephone to better inform them about the time and format of the interview. The participants were also asked if taping would be permissible, reassured of the confidentiality of the study, and thanked for their participation. The interviewer began the interview with a short explanation of how the interview was to be taped and what needed to be done so that everything would be recorded clearly. The interviewer also had participants sign consent forms (see Appendix A) and continued on with the interview questions. All the participants agreed to have the interview taped.

At the closing of the interview the participants were reassured of the confidentiality of the interviews and notified that all tapes would be destroyed after all

information had been transcribed. Finally, the interviewer explained how the content data would be examined. The participants were again thanked for their time and were allowed to leave. The tapes were transcribed and destroyed upon completion of transcription.

Treatment of Data

The information collected from the interviews was transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis because the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research. “The constant comparative method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers who are not seeking to build substantive theory” (Merriam, 1998, p.159). Responses to the questions were combined to seek out similarities and differences within the participant’s experience. Quotes that were related to the questions were selected in order to give voice to the themes established in the constant comparative analysis. Themes were analyzed in relation to the research questions provided in the review of literature. In chapter IV the data are organized by the research questions. Within each research question the voices of the participants were analyzed in relation to the themes.

Chapter IV

Results

The results of the focus group interviews have been organized under the four research questions established in the introduction. The first question explored the academic experiences of African American males on a predominantly white versus a predominantly Black campus. The second question looked for similarities and differences, if any, in their co-curriculum activities. The third question examined obstacles to survival within the college environment that Black males experience. The final research question explored some of the issues surrounding retention and attrition related to the Black male college experience.

A focus group protocol was developed to use with both focus groups. The participants from the predominantly Black university participated in one focus group and the participants from the predominantly white university participated in the second focus group. For the purposes of this study, the students were asked to answer the interview questions based on their own personal experiences.

Research Question #1: What are the academic experiences of African American males on a predominantly white campus versus a predominantly black college?

This respondents on both campuses indicated that academic culture impacted their experience as a student. However, African American males on the predominantly white campus expressed problems in different areas concerning their general academic experience than their counterparts on predominantly Black campuses. These differences were organized under the following three academic themes: academic advisement and instruction, academic motivation, and academic attention.

Academic advisement and instruction

The students in the focus group who studied at predominantly White colleges expressed a sense of frustration concerning the faculty members who were also their academic advisors were not concerned about their academic success. The advisors did not appear to pay enough attention to the participants and seem to have had difficulty knowing how to keep or perhaps care about keeping the Black students focused on their academic pursuits. Responses from the students indicate that advisement can play a crucial role in African American male development and/or success on predominantly white college campuses. One respondent stated he had to take care of himself to get the classes critical to graduating in a timely manner. He felt there was no need to depend on an advisor of another racial background because they didn't understand his particular needs as an African-American male. Furthermore, he felt the advisors related better to people within the same race, especially women of his own race, while he got "leftover" advice.

He sometimes just gives me advice that's totally irrelevant to what I am trying to do and what I need to do...I take it in my own hands. I get the course catalog, I go online, and I make sure I match up all my classes. I make sure I got everything so I can graduate... I mean the advisors down here me being a black man I don't wanna sound racist but its like they know how to take care of their own a little bit better especially the Caucasian women.

In another case, a low GPA and delayed graduation was blamed on poor advisement:

From my time of being down here, my first semester 3.6, the following semester 3.2, past semester 2.8, right now I am dealing with the advising screwing you over

telling you, you need to take this you need to take that and then you take it, it is something you don't need or something you already took in the first place therefore it hinders you, and sets you back. I should have graduated this past December but my advisor did not tell me about a foreign language class that was needed, I picked it up this semester, then I got called earlier this semester and was told that I was short 15 more credit hours. Therefore, it looks like I won't be getting out of here again. Now they are saying they are going to try handle things and get waivers for me because of mistakes of my advisors.

However, one participant stated not all the advisors were non-caring. He thought some of them actually cared about their job and were concerned about students under their responsibility. Yet, even this individual admitted that advisors ultimately appeared to take better care of White students:

A lot of people are dealing with advising problems down here. There are only a handful of advisors down here that are really seeking to help students, and I think by us being Black male students here they gotta keep us here a little bit longer to try to get as much money as they can out of us. They cater to the Caucasians a little bit better. They make sure they take the steps necessary for them to get scholarships and everything else that can be beneficial towards there advancement in their college career.

Another participant echoed this response and indicated having learned to become more independent of his advisor and figure things out for himself. He acknowledged that advisors make mistakes. "I try to get things done on my own, no matter what the advisor told me. I also understand that they are nothing more than an advisor and it falls on my

shoulders if I do something wrong. So, I make sure I go back and check anything he tells me. I go back and double check and make sure its what the catalog says'

The respondents who attended predominantly Black colleges did not express concerns about academic advisement. They viewed their advisement as being helpful to them in their matriculation. They experienced their advisors as being caring, nurturing, and very influential in terms of accountability for grades. However, one respondent expressed that he doesn't go and see his advisor "as often as he should". The African Americans' overall experience with advisement at the predominantly Black college was a positive experience. As one respondent stated: "I try to find time to go and see my advisor at least once a month, it helps me a little bit more in my classes." The Black colleges academic advisors were more concerned about classroom instruction, discussed in the next section.

Academic instruction was perceived more negatively by African American males on predominantly black college campuses than did the black males on predominantly white campuses. Focus group participants who attended predominantly black campuses were critical of the teaching styles of their professors and their classroom experiences.

In one situation, a participant noted that he did not get the necessary information needed for his class because the professor lacked the teaching skills and content knowledge necessary for him to learn. Therefore he had to find other means of getting the information to help him in the class: "I learn more on my own than from what he is teaching us. I have to learn on my own from working with other students".

Another participant agreed that some of the faculty lacked the content knowledge necessary to teach well or worse, were assigned courses outside their area of expertise.

The participants stated it was easy to spot an instructor who was teaching outside their specialty area. Even if the professor had an excellent teaching style, the participants knew they would have to seek outside help to gain the information necessary for them to learn the material.

Some of the core classes, in many ways I have to question, because the simple fact is that some of the teachers don't even know (a) the concept or (b) the content of what they are teaching. They have just been given a class to teach because classes are so high in demand here they don't take the time to educate the professors on what they are doing and how to handle certain situations.

Communication was also brought up as a concern in terms of limiting the educational value of the classroom experience. The participants expressed frustration that they sometimes could not understand what was going on in the classroom due to the instructor's poor communication style.

Once I was assigned to take a kind of an algebra class and the professor who taught the class did not speak a lick of English, that was the first problem, second problem I ask him a simple question and he goes all around the thing without even answering it so I had to figure out some of the problems on my own. On another occasion, I took an English writing class and it's not the language barrier that was the problem, it was the content that was the problem.

The result of having professors either teaching outside their area of expertise or not having good command of English or good communication skills in general caused participants to feel uncomfortable in classes. In addition, student perceptions of ineptness on the part of instructors discouraged the students from seeking out one-on-one help from

the professor. As one respondent stated: “I am not comfortable with some of my classes because I am not comfortable going to the professor with any questions because I don’t think I will get the correct means of solving the problem”.

One student commented: “Some people may think these teachers aren’t really teaching us anything, so maybe I should transfer to another school”.

Another student commented about taking one of his classes and his feelings of the importance of the class to him:

I got an F on my anthropology paper. I don’t know if you want to call that a bad experience. I didn’t like it because I feel like the teacher is not teaching us anything in that class and for me to get an F in that class makes no sense. It’s not like I was really learning in that class. I only took that class cause it counts toward what I need to graduate. That’s basically why I am taking it. It’s not like I am going to use anthropology anyway. I say maybe a fourth of what I was exposed to I may use out in the world. But the rest of the stuff I may not use, especially in my field. I am in physical therapy, which is a hands-on field.

The focus group participants on predominantly White campuses did not share the same concerns about teaching style. Other than class size, which was described as considerably larger on predominantly White campuses, these Black students share no other concerns about these classroom experiences..

Academic Motivation

The students at predominantly Black campuses were not as concerned about the classes being too easy or too challenging, but rather it was an issue of internal motivation.

Some expressed their struggles with motivation in terms such as "laziness", and "just getting by". One was not sure why he lacked motivation - "I don't know why".

African American males from both predominantly white and predominantly black universities struggled to maintain adequate g.p.a.s. Black males who attended the predominantly Black college reported having lower GPA's than those who were interviewed at the predominantly White college. One of the students interviewed at the predominantly black college commented, "I am comfortable with my classes, but I am not comfortable with my GPA". Another student commented, "I am sitting at a 2.7, I know I can do better. If I get a 3.0, I might get a heart attack I don't know. I am serious, my grade point average always stayed at about a 2.6."

African American males who attended predominantly White college campuses reported having problems with motivation, sometimes because the workload was perceived as too easy. The students felt the work in classes did not get very challenging for them unless they simultaneously received multiple assignments from the various classes in which they were enrolled (meaning, having several projects/papers due at one time). As one respondent stated, "I feel I could shoot for a 4.0. As of right now I am between a 3.0 and a 3.3. I feel like if I apply myself better in my classes, I could get straight A's you know its always that "but" in there, its up to me to push and go to the next level." Another student commented:

My comfort level here is above the bar, I mean, I enjoy the classes here...they are a piece of cake actually. I don't see why students shouldn't maintain a 3.5 or better depending on what classes you are taking or his or your major. I am a speech comm. major and the classes I don't find too difficult.

Academic Attention

Issues related to academic attention were large classrooms and lack of one-on-one instruction. Black males at the predominantly white university stated their classes were very large which made teachers appear uncaring. All that appeared to matter to the teachers was that one completes the required assignments. As one respondent stated, anything else did not matter:

I was in a communication theory lecture class. I had never been in a class with no more than 30 people and there were maybe 120 or 130 people in this class. The teacher was good. But me, I like to get to know the professor on like a one-on-one basis, with that class it was like totally impossible. The majority of the time it was like no attendance, no nothing. I could have gone to class only one day out of the whole semester. I noticed some students, never came to class and it was just weird. Is this is what it is all about? I just grab my syllabus, go to the teacher's website and look at my notes. Its things like that and that let's me know professors really don't care. It's just all about the money. They throw you in a lecture class with about 150 something people. That is shows right there they don't care about you. I think that's really uncaring.

Although African Americans males on predominantly white campuses expressed negative feelings about their academic experiences, not all the participants had a negative experience with their professors. One particular student talked about a positive experience he encountered with a professor. He was not expecting the professor to give helpful advice because he feels many of the instructors would not understand him or would not have handled the situation in the same way. He commented:

Right before this spring break we had a midterm coming up in my economics class and I actually missed a test day. We did not have anything but three-test total, and that was the only grade for the class. I ended up missing a test for some personal reasons and my teacher was real cool about it. He told me he understood and I could come in and take the test whenever I was ready to take it. To me, I don't think a lot of teachers down here would do that. If you miss a test day you just miss a test day. That's your bad luck. I was really surprised at the way he handled that situation.

Research Question #2: What are some of the similarities and differences, if any, in the co-curricular experiences of Black males attending predominantly Black versus predominantly White colleges?

African American males at predominantly white and black institutions have different co-curricular experiences in the areas of employment opportunities and involvement in student organizations.

Employment Opportunities

The African American males interviewed at the predominantly black institution had either part-time or fulltime jobs and used these jobs to support themselves throughout college. African American males on predominantly black colleges were employed because they felt it necessary to have a sense of responsibility. One of the student participants worked fulltime and the other two worked part-time because it was necessary for their survival. African American males on the predominantly White campus found it hard to obtain employment. This was not as big of a concern since they were more

focused on school and received financial aid in amounts significant enough to eliminate the necessity for them to seek employment (either full or part-time).

Relevance of employment

When asked about the work experiences of students at the predominantly black university, the participants stated that working fulltime helped them keep “money in their pocket” and allowed them to take care of whatever bills and other obligations they had. For example, one student commented: “I work fulltime as an LPN at [a local] hospital and I also have a daughter to support”. Another student obtained two jobs while in school. One of his jobs was on campus and the other job was with the United States Parcel Service.

Interviewees at the predominantly White institutions appeared to have more obstacles in finding employment but also less personal incentive to pursue it. One of the interviewees felt that employment was not easy to obtain for young African American males, although they had to use other means of trying to maintain financial security because there was a lack of family support. They tended to use the financial aid they received from the college to get by during the school year.

One of the interviewees commented:

Down here, I had to deal with like obstacles like financial obstacles. Its truly hard being down here and you can't find any means of employment and you don't have too much coming from home because there is nothing there. You gotta try to meet as many people as you can so you can use their dining dollars and that can get rough. Sometimes you don't want people to really know your business.

The African American males at the predominantly White institution felt that employment would find enter into their lives after they achieved their educational goals. At this point in their lives, education was their main priority. Once they have completed their educational requirements, they would pursue work seriously since they would also have other obligations such as starting a family and other things. One student at the PWI commented on the importance of education versus work:

I know the goal at hand is to get my degree. Then, I will be able to look back and say, okay it was fun while it lasted, but now it is time to get into the workforce and take care of business and make some money. That is when work becomes a priority.

Another student commented on his belief about working while in school and he also explained the method he used to save and have money during the school year without having to work and go to school at the same time:

I am not employed at all I don't really believe in being employed and going to school. It takes away from my academics so I just work really hard over the summers to collect money to get me by during the school year. I also have support from my family.

One student that was unemployed commented that he was only looking for something to just keep him busy:

At this present time I am currently unemployed, but I am looking for something to employ me just for right now. The job market is pretty tight with this war and everything going on. I just need something part time, right now, nothing too

stressful. I am getting by on my financial aid and that is really all I need for right now.

Student Organizations

There are some students on predominantly White campuses that need things to do while on campus, especially those who are on college campuses that are not located in metropolitan areas. They are looking for opportunities that will not interrupt their focus on school, but at the same time, something to occupy their emptiness of lack of activities.

Students on the predominantly White college campus appeared to be more involved in campus activities versus the males on the predominantly Black college campus. If the students at the predominantly Black campus participated in any activities, it was because it dealt with their particular field of study. They felt the only reason they should participate in any activities was to become more involved with their major and add to their resume. "This campus doesn't have too much going on, so why should I participate unless it benefits my major and me". They expressed that if the activity had nothing to do with their major, it was not worth their time.

The students on the predominantly white college campus were so involved in activities due to the type of city where the school was located. Because the city was small with few social outlets when compared to urban cities, there were few reasons for the students to remain in town during weekends and holidays. Many students went home for the weekend and did not participate as often in the activities of the college community. This phenomenon also produced the trend of socializing more frequently with other African Americans. One student on the predominantly white campus commented that his university "is in such a small town that if you come from a big city

you get bored quickly so you look for things to do”. Another student commented on involvement with campus organizations:

I participate in some of the events down here on campus. I volunteer every now and again. You know with the kids I have a program, actually. I was also thinking about doing the Upward Bound program this summer, I do different things to participate on campus.

However, some African American males on the predominantly white college campus reported keeping to themselves even though they may be involved in some of the organizations on campus. Some African American males students, no matter what goes on within the campus atmosphere still need to have time to themselves. One student commented:

I am a member of [a fraternity]. Other than that, other activities that I may get myself involved in intramural sports, mainly basketball and probably softball if I find a team worth getting on. Other than that, I keep to myself and handle my academics

Research Question #3: What are some of the obstacles to survival within the college environment that Black males’ experience?

Some of the obstacles to survival that Black males experience in college dealt with academics and personal issues. These are two areas that can hinder the success of these students if they allow them to get in the way of their learning process.

Academic Obstacles

African American males who were interviewed at the predominantly Black institution reported obstacles that were more related to academics. They reported having

problems such as being put on academic probation (that is not maintaining a high enough grade point average and as a result getting certain privileges taken away), doing just enough to allow themselves to pass a class, (that is maintaining the lowest grade that was allowed and not requiring too much work for them to get credit for the course), and laziness. Laziness in this context refers to students having the skills necessary to accomplish class requirements, but not wanting to put forth the effort to do it. One student commented on feeling as if he were in jail when he was on academic probation:

I came off of probation after one semester. I wasn't doing all of my work and I let my grades drop below a 2.0 so I got put on probation. I had to take up a summer class and bring up the grade. I didn't like probation and I felt like I was in jail or something.

Another student commented on how his laziness was an obstacle for him. He would do just enough work that would allow him to get a decent grade in a class. He did not see any purpose in putting forth the effort to go above and beyond his set goal of "just getting by":

I think I need to get over my laziness. It is my major obstacle. I came in with the same mindset as high school and I had to try and adjust. Now I kinda went back into that high school mindset. I have no idea why I am like that. I have no explanation. They have been telling me about my laziness since grammar school, I don't know what it is. I mean I am motivated, I can do good. A couple of times I may do this and do that and then I get on the honor roll, and then I turn around and get all D's.

The African American males interviewed at the predominantly White institution did not make comments about any academic obstacles incurred while in school.

Personal Obstacles

Personal obstacles are things that a lot of college students deal with on a day-to-day basis. However, African American male students at both the predominantly black and white institutions have unique personal obstacles to overcome. Their personal hurdles may or may not have affected the learning of these students because they may have been able to separate their personal problems from school, or they may not have been able to separate the two, thus affecting their concentration on school. One student commented on his personal struggle with the death of his father:

My father passed so I had to deal with that and dig deep down inside to see what I really wanted to do with my life. I made a promise to him before he died that I was going to finish school and take care of my mom. I feel like those are the main obstacles I am dealing with in my life. They hurt me for a while, it was over a year and a half ago and it still bothers me. When I usually had a problem, I always ran and talked to my father.

The same respondent also stated that having a male figure in one's life can make a difference in one's behavior as an African American male:

I could not be as open as I wanted to with my mom because with guys you gotta have your dad right there for you. There are certain things that you just cannot talk to your mom about. I cannot be as grown up as I want to be when talking to my mom. I was not able to be as open as I wanted to be with my father and I miss that.

Not all African American male students have problems dealing with education. They sometimes have other problems that also may or may not affect their progress in school. Another student indicated that he did not encounter many school obstacles, but he understood that people do suffer. He still struggled with other obstacles, primarily family issues, but they were not related to school. He was “just happy that he did not encounter many problems at school, but that did not make him invincible to problems”.

Really I have not had any obstacles like the other two people being interviewed.

Everything, more or less, has been smooth sailing for me. My parents try to make sure that while I am down here it is all about my books. When I go home, it is a different story when it comes to obstacles. That is a story within itself.

Research Question #4: What are some of the issues surrounding retention and attrition related to the Black males' collegiate experience?

According to (Lang, 2001), student retention in higher education in general and minority student retention specifically are issues that are at a ongoing concern to colleges. Retention can be defined as the flow of students through college over a discrete period of time. Four categories of student outcomes are typically identified and discussed. They are: graduates, those students who complete a bachelors degree; persisters, those students who are continuously enrolled and sustained over a period of time; stopouts, those students who left and subsequently returned, and; dropouts, those who left and did not return (<http://www.csupomona.edu/~irp/Rentention/annotatedINSIGHTS.pdf>.)

The respondents indicated three variables that influenced their decision to stay in school despite feelings of wanting to go home. These variables were shared between the two sets of focus group participants and indicate the importance of family in helping

them persevere through difficult times. The importance of what they were trying to achieve, obtaining their college degree, was seen as the first variable that impacted retention

The second variable that influenced retention, according to the participants, was the fear of disappointing their family.

I got family members looking up to me being the youngest in my family. I have 4 brothers and three sisters looking up to me. Then I have nieces and nephews. Its like all eyes are on me. You know, if I was to drop out now I would be looked at as a failure or a reject or something. I don't want to have lingering over my head "I couldn't do it" or "I couldn't finish school, something easy and simple."

Lastly, some of the respondents echoed the previous respondent with reasons why they stayed in school. The also stated they stayed in school because other people were looking up to them for guidance in their future endeavors.

Attrition, on the other hand, did not seem to be a major problem among any of the interviewees. However, they did offer insight based on their experience with others on why some African American males drop out of school. One of the respondents at the predominantly white institution stated that all African American males are not able to adapt to the collegiate atmosphere. This particular respondent speaks on how being able to adapt affected his motivation to stay in college:

A lot of people drop out because they cannot adapt... That right there keeps me focused. I don't want to drop out or I don't want to go home. If I go home I would feel like I was a failure to my grandma who busted her butt working twelve hour days for the last 40 something odd years just so my dad had something.

Then I see my dad turn around and work 40 something hour weeks and 50 something hour weeks just to make sure I am down here and I have nothing to worry about but going to school. To me, that's the thing that keeps me going. I can't go home to have my people that work so hard to keep me down here see me come home and basically be a failure.

Finding the perfect fit or adapting at predominantly White institutions can become a problem for black males. Being raised in a housing and/or peer environment that is totally different from their college environment can cause African American males to struggle with the initial adjustment to academic life. They may be accustomed to things being done a certain way within their culture but when they get to a predominantly White environment, they find their habits of behavior may not be considered "the correct way". One respondent spoke about how African American males may not have a particular type of lifestyle that is fit for the college atmosphere and that can cause a student to feel unwelcome to the campus environment: "I think with Black males, sometimes our lifestyles are not right or fit down here. Maybe it is because of how things are set up or maybe it is more of us as a person".

Another issue that the participants thought African American males struggle with was balancing the demands of academic and personal needs. Not only were they trying to adjust to a new culture, but also they were discovering their priorities and the real purpose for being in college. One respondent recognized a problem with a students' organization skills and was able to use himself as an example.

First of all, their priorities are mixed up. God knows I was there. They have other things concerning them and they haven't found the way or some of them haven't

found the way to achieve that balance between their scholastic life and their personal life. I was at my breaking point several years ago and it forced me to take two years off from school to figure out what I want to do.

Lastly, motivation was stated as an issue the participants recognized as a stumbling block for some of their friends. With it, one can experience the success needed to complete college. Sometimes it was required that they have self-motivation because without it there was room for failure. Based on the answers of some of the respondents, African American males appeared to give up easily while in college. One respondent commented:

Black males, period, just give up on a whim and that hurts black males because they think it's somebody else's fault when they choose not to look in the mirror and see their shortcomings. I am one that was at that point, I have been at the point. I several times to be perfectly honest, and each time I forced myself to take a step back and look in the mirror and see where I went wrong instead of looking for someone else to blame.

Other Issues on Predominantly Black College Campuses

Several issues were brought up during the interview that did not focus directly on the questions for this research. However, four issues are worth noting since they were repeated several times and they were supported by both groups. These four issues were the importance of peer relationships, diversity, lack of administrative support, and stereotypes.

Peer Relationship

Peer relationships were identified as an important concern. The participants at predominantly black campuses noted the unfortunate way some black males treat African American females on campus: "Sometimes I get mad at how the brothers treat the sisters on campus". He was mainly concerned about how African American males speak negatively about the females on campus. "I may get an attitude or something like that...you can say something to a woman without calling her this and that...words do hurt".

Because African American males have a mixed variety of friends, some of those friends may feel they cannot succeed within the college environment. Peer relationships can help these individuals keep motivated, especially if there are other friends who set a good academic example. Unfortunately, this process can also work the other way and influence peers towards things that may not be very positive.

I am kinda mad because some of my friends don't wanna go to college. We all grew up together and here. I am going to the next level and I try to talk to them I am like come on man I am in here. They are like, man, I ain't got no money like that. My financial aid is taking care of me. In high school I was making the worst grades out of everybody I had a 1.9. I almost didn't graduate, so I am like, if I can do it, they can do it too.

At predominantly Black universities, the average age of students entering college has been reported to be older than the traditional age of students at predominantly white universities. This can become a problem for African American males entering college beyond the traditional college age of 18 or 19. They are not able to be around many

students in their age group, therefore there is no one who is able to relate to their problems. The same student that expressed feelings about his peers in college also commented on the traditional age of college students at his university: "It seems like everyone is older 25 or 26, I am 19, where are all the people my age".

Diversity

Diversity can play a vital role in society and students have a need to be around people of other races so they will not feel confined to their own racial environment. The students interviewed at the predominantly Black university had concerns about the lack of diversity within their school. Specifically, they were concerned that a lack of diversity could limit their opportunities to learn from other cultures and practice working with groups other than their own, a useful skill for entering today's job market. One student expressed his concern this way, "I would like for it to be mixed because when you get out into society its going to be mixed anyway, I figure people should learn how to be around all different types of people."

Administrative Support

Administration on college campuses plays a big role in the college environment. Students need to see administrators taking an interest in their activities, which in turn motivates the students to participate more. One student spoke about how there is no support from the administrators on his campus.

I just want the administrators here to show their support and not by just writing letters. Get the hell out of the office and show your face! Show your face around pat some people on the back and tell them nice job, or tell them this is what you are doing wrong. I suggest they get the hell out of that cage, go walk around take

a peek at the campus see how its enlightened or deteriorating in some cases.

However, they choose not to do that. You know, this is so much of a gold mine here and they don't realize it and they are going to let it deteriorate until there is nothing left. That bugs me, it truly bugs me.

Stereotypes

The last theme that was identified was stereotypes. This theme emerged from the African American males interviewed at the predominantly White institution. They expressed how Whites view them and look at them differently "I am just tired of these White people looking crazy at night. Like I can't walk the campus, or I can't walk on the pond or jog at night". He expressed that he also liked to do things that may only be stereotyped as things that Whites do a lot more frequently than African American males, "I am trying to enjoy my life like you".

The same respondent also commented on how he feels that Whites may feel threatened by him because he is an African American male. African American males were not responded to very well by everyone in the campus community and it may be related to reasons such as the town being predominantly White, and area citizens not being used to seeing a lot of African Americans in the area: "Some people are cool, but you also have the ones who are just walking and nod their head like they are scared [don't be scared of me]".

Another respondent from the predominantly White university agree with the previous respondent about African American males being just like everyone else:

Do not be afraid of us down here. We're a different race of people we have the same goals we trying to achieve goals and be educated as well. You know, we are

trying to get our education we trying to better ourselves in the long run so we can set examples for our kids, even if I don't go on and get my Master's, I got my bachelors I want my child to do better than me and go to school to get his or her Masters degree.

Summary

Overall there were many differences found between African American males at predominantly White and Black institutions. Some were positive and some were also negative. Research question number one, regarding the academic experiences of these African American males produced numerous responses and several themes were identified. The African American males interviewed identified academic advisement and instruction, academic motivation, and academic attention as being the main subjects of discussion.

Research question two discussed the similarities and differences in the co-curricular activities of African American males at predominantly Black and White institutions. It produced two major themes based on the interviews. One theme was the employment opportunities of the interviewees and the differences between the importance of working versus school between the males at the predominantly Black institution and the predominantly White institution. The other theme identified from this question was student organizations. This theme identified the activity patterns of these particular African American males.

Research question number three discussed some of the obstacles that Black males encountered at predominantly Black and White institutions. The obstacles appeared to be unique to each participant rather than a common problem. Research question four

discussed the retention and attrition of African American males. This question did not gather much information in the subject area of retention from the participants because they did not appear to be interested in talking about retention from either of the two institutions. However, attrition was the subject that the interviewees appeared to have more interest in discussion about from both the predominantly Black and White institutions.

The respondents talked about any other issues they wanted that were not related to the interview questions. They identified issues that bothered them such as peers, diversity, administrative support, and stereotypes. It was found that some of the interviewees had concerns about their peers with regards to the treatment of their own race. Interviewees at the predominantly Black institution showed concerns about diversity not playing a vital role on their campus because the campus was mainly confined to one racial environment. The interviewees had issues with administrators not playing a big part in the activities on campus and interacting with African American students.

The last theme the interviewees identified was the issue of African American males being stereotyped by others. The interviewees expressed feelings as if they were not equal and people were threatened by their mere presence.

Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the similarities and differences in the collegiate experiences of selected African American males attending a predominantly white institution and a predominantly black institution in the Midwest. This research examined their collegiate experience in four areas that included socialization, academic performance, involvement in the co-curriculum, and retention and attrition behaviors. The data from this study both support and deviate from existing literature on this topic. This following section relates the findings of this study to the previous research literature.

The information obtained during this qualitative study concerning the academic performance of Black males was consistent with the findings of Davis (1991). His findings suggested that different racial environments could affect academic advisement and achievement within predominantly White and predominantly black institutions. He also suggested that the academic achievement of African American males could depend on the kind of college they attend and be influenced by cultural stereotypes as well. Cultural stereotypes, such as the assumption that Black males are surrounded by crime, drugs, and gangs, make it difficult for them to succeed in a society that presupposes they cannot (Fries-Britt, 1997).

This research extended Davis's (1991) discussion beyond success to include instruction, academic motivation, and academic attrition. There were differences in the academic performance of the African American males who participated in this study at the predominantly Black and White institutions. The African American males at the predominantly White institution had better academic grades than the Black males at the

predominantly black institution. This result might be due to the sample of students who were interviewed, or the measured academic aptitude of the PWI Black males (ACT or SAT scores) might reflect the generally higher admissions standards of this particular PWI institution compared to the HBCU institution. Moreover, the rural setting of the PWI compared to the urban setting of the HBCU could mean that PWI African American males were less distracted by off-campus temptations. They were also more likely to be living on campus where students can typically earn higher GPA's compared to students living off campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

African American males can have positive or negative experiences in the academic environment depending on their comfort level in their academic environment, (Cuyjet, 1997). Fleming (1984) stated that black college males can become unhappy with college life and many feel like they are being treated unfairly. Davis (1999) described how African American males feel alienated if they have had a negative experience with their professors and as a result try not to interact with their professors outside of the classroom.

Like Fleming (1984) and Davis (1999), the findings in this study indicated that African American males at either PWI's or HBCU's experienced teachers who appeared to be indifferent to their needs and were perceived as catering more to students of their own race. This study also found that a lot of the African American males interviewed were not very comfortable in the classroom setting, especially those who attended predominantly White schools.

Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) indicated that some academic advisors lead African American males away from certain disciplines because they were assumed not to

have the necessary motivation and ambition to take on such disciplines. This research found a different problem with advisement. Although there was no mention of discipline bias, students did suggest that advisors did not help them navigate the intricacies of their major in terms of what to take, when, and how best to finish their degree programs in a timely manner. The issue of stereotyping negatively impacted advising, because the advisors do not have experience with working with other students.

The males interviewed at the predominantly black institution reported having more positive experiences with their advisors than did students attending the PWI. Reasons for this were related to social comfort between advisor and student and the ability of the advisor to address same race needs more effectively than their White counterparts. In other words, they have a better cultural understanding of what Black students want and were willing to take the time to address their unique needs.

A second major research concern was the similarities and differences in the co-curricular experiences of African American males. Davis (1994) and Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) found that African Americans on predominantly White campuses do not participate in co-curricular activities as often as their male counterparts on predominantly Black college campuses. In the former case, it may occur due to feelings of isolation while the latter group feels more comfortable with their own race.

In contrast, this present study indicated that African American males on predominantly White campuses participated more in activities than the African American Males interviewed on the predominantly Black college campus. Similar to Davis's findings, the participants in this study who attended the predominantly White college also felt isolated but were obviously more motivated to seek out co-curricular experiences,

generally out of boredom and a lack of Black oriented community activities. In addition, the participants who attended predominantly Black college campuses were not as active in co-curricular experiences as one would expect, given the research of Davis (1994). It was clear from the interview that the participants were more concerned with working to support themselves than being active in activities on campus. In contrast, the African American males attending predominantly White college campuses were more concerned with their academics, which left them more free time to pursue co-curricular experiences.

A third major concern of this research was attempting to determine obstacles to success for Black males on predominantly white and predominantly Black college campuses. Results showed that obstacles to success for Black males were varied as each person interviewed and no overriding issues surfaced during the interview. The obstacles ranged as follows, in no particular order of importance: 1) personal obstacles (i.e. related to family), 2) financial obstacles (i.e. related to money), and 3) academic obstacles (i.e. related to schoolwork, teachers, etcetera...).

Ross (1998) stated that African American males who pursue college needed to experience a sense of nurturing in order to assist them in overcoming obstacles in college. The act of being nurtured was critical to their sense of survival and confidence needed to overcome not only institutional barriers, but also daily life obstacles. Likewise, Lee, (1996) identified institutional bias as a major obstacle that prevents African American males from realizing the full benefit of their educational opportunities.

Ross (1998) and Lee (1996) indicated similar findings as the participants expressed frustration and disappointment at not having the necessary relationships with professors and advisors that would help them feel comfortable with the overall college

environment. Students echoed the need for nurturing, expressing feeling like an “endangered species” and in need of “specialized attention.” Many African American males lack the family support and guidance to help them understand both the fact of institutional barriers and also how to overcome them. Mentors on campus were deemed critical surrogate parents who could help guide the students through the process and understand what was needed to succeed.

The final area of research concern was related to attrition and retention of African American males at predominantly Black and White institutions. According to research conducted by Feagin, Vera, & Imani (1996), the retention of African American males is important not only because it is the right thing to do, but retention also plays a critical role in their success because they are able to observe what their peers are doing to successfully matriculate through college. Concomitantly, the reported retention and attrition behavior of African American males in this study varied depending on the type of academic and social support the school offered.

Feagin, Imani, & Vera (1996) also indicated that African American males needed to focus on their academics rather than worrying about staying in school or dropping out. This preoccupation with survival was a serious educational problem faced by the group of individuals. Also, universities can sometime be ignorant or unresponsive to the special needs of Black students further complicating their adjustment to college life (Fleming, 1984). Tinto (1993) found that when African American males arrived on campus, they brought with them built in characteristics such as family background and history, pre-college educational achievements, academic abilities, and other various personal contributions that influence the rate of student persistence. Unfortunately, some African

American males enter college socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged. Interestingly, the participants in this study did not experience this preoccupation with surviving in school. However, the participants were eager to speculate on why other African American males dropped out of college. According to the participants, African American males faced substantial adjustment issues that lead many to speculate if dropping out of college and doing something else would be less stressful. The interviewees also mentioned lack of preparation by family and environment making the college experience more stressful, mostly because of the fear of the unknown and doubts about succeeding in an untested and unfamiliar situation. Getting a poor grade in class was presented as innocuous by some students, but for others it represented potential failure and led to irrational thoughts, such as "I'll never make it in this course/major so I need to switch." This constant doubt lead to premature dropping which in terms spiraled into a behavior pattern resulting in higher attrition rates.

Another issue mentioned by the participants as a cause for attrition was a lack of priorities. Several of the participants reported getting sidetracked from their goal of graduation into areas that were important to them but do not lead to college success. This was especially a reason for concern for black males because they encountered more problems in comparison to the general college population.

Fortunately, the participants had several motivating factors helping them stay in school despite the obstacles listed earlier. Several of the interviewees commented that competition was a motivating factor: "I want to be successful and be better than the next guy". More than one stated that succeeding in school was a way to give back something to the people who had sacrificed so much to help him make it in college. They also

wanted to use the knowledge they gained to motivate and be a mentor or counselor to other young African American males. Most of the males interviewed were positive about what they wanted to do in their lives. They understood the importance of being in college and what it meant to their future success.

Other issues were discussed by the participants that did not fit neatly with any of the original research questions. For example, the participants were anxious to discuss what they perceived as administrators that were neither helpful nor interested in African American issues. This perceived lack of attention gave the participants the perception that the campus was unwelcoming and uncomfortable.

Another issue that was discussed by the African American males interviewed on the predominantly White college campus was how others viewed them in the college community. They felt others perceived them as a threat rather than as normal people enjoying life. A simple jog across campus at night resulted in wary reactions from others. These African American males wanted people to see them as human beings trying to achieve goals and not be intimidated or frightened by them.

The African Americans males on the predominantly black college campus also talked about the issue of racism on campus. They felt that African American males should treat people of their race with more respect, especially the women, because they should be able to understand the struggles of one another. Surprisingly, they perceived some African American males on campus who treated the African American females as if they “were nothing” and “talked bad about them.”

Limitations

Some limitations to this study are worth noting. Qualitative research is by nature a process of sharing experiences between the researcher and subjects. Sometimes this experience is so similar that bias can be an issue. As Morrow and Smith (2000) stated:

...because of the shared culture and experience, both investigators and participants may fall prey to shared assumptions and taken-for-granted meanings, leading the researcher to fail to go into sufficient depth to understand participant meanings or to allow events in their field to go unnoticed or unquestioned because of their familiarity” (p. 209).

Beyond this general limitation, there are two additional specific limitations.

1. The first limitation was that these results were based on only two institutions in the Midwest. Getting information from multiple institutions would have allowed the researcher to gather more information on how Black males on other types of campuses experience retention and attrition issues.
2. The second limitation was the lack of a larger and more diverse focus group. Having a larger focus group could have generated more ideas from different males of different backgrounds.

Recommendations

Based on the data presented, several recommendations are offered for those who wish to better understand ways to help African American males become more successful students at the college level.

1. Institutions must continually evaluate the cultural climate of the campus and seek to address ways to improve the overall experience of students, specifically for

African American males. Programs such as transition and mentoring to better acclimate the African American male to the specific college culture would provide the opportunity for students to realize that their college culture may be vastly different from their own educational experience and thus be more prepared to deal with the unique hurdles of college life. Likewise, once there, mentoring would provide role modeling and specific information needed to make career decisions without presumed assumptions or bias about the ability of the students because they come from a particular racial group.

2. A second recommendation would be for institutions to involve more African American faculty and administrators in the transition and mentoring programs once they are established. African American males would feel more comfortable talking to someone who can better relate to their experience. Perhaps administrators could seek out existing models to use (Bledsoe, 1991) (www.2cusaab.org).

Conclusion

The results of this study indicated that African American males in predominantly black and predominantly white institutions had different areas of concern relative to each research question and the type of school they attended being predominantly Black or predominantly White. The main area discussed appeared to be academics from males attending the predominantly White institution. They revealed problems with academic advisement as opposed to the problem on predominantly Black institutions being seen as academic instruction and communication. Other Areas discussed were academic

motivation, academic attention, employment, student organizations, obstacles, and retention and attrition.

Emerging from the findings were other issues related to African American males that were not directly related to this research. These areas were identified by the interviewees while discussing other matters they felt were important to discuss such as peers, diversity, administrative support, and stereotypes.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Jamill Taylor
Graduate Assistant
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600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL. 61920

March 6, 2003

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student at Eastern Illinois University working on my thesis – “A Qualitative Analysis of the Affective Experiences of Black Undergraduate males in Predominantly White and Black Universities.”

The purpose of this study is to identify the similarities and differences in the collegiate experiences of selected undergraduate males in the areas of socialization, academic performance, involvement in the co-curriculum, retention and attrition behaviors.

In order to gather data on this subject, you have been asked to participate in a focus group in which you will be interviewed and audio taped. The information collected from this study will be used for my thesis in which I will include a written analysis of the experiences you share with me as a participant.

Your participation in this study may help faculty and student affairs administrators better understand the experiences of African American males in the critical areas mentioned above. Your participation will also help to improve our understanding of the college environment in general.

All information obtained during this study will be kept strictly confidential and securely stored. Names of participants will not be used in the study and all references to specific comments will be anonymous. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may decline to participate without any further obligation at any time. I thank you in advance for your time and participation.

In signing this consent form, I agree to;

- A- Participate in this study voluntarily
- B- Agree to allow quotations without attribution
- C- Reserve the right to withdraw at any time
- D- Give permission for the electronic recording of my interviews

Respondent

Date

Jamill Taylor

Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Introduction questions

What is your name?

Where are you from?

What are your majors as well as year in school?

Activities

Do you participate in any organizations outside of the classroom?

Are you involved in any student organizations?

Do any of you work full or part time?

In what ways do you think these out of class activities contribute to your personal growth or development?

Which of these activities has been the most helpful to your development if helpful at all?

Academics

Now I want to talk a little bit more about some of your experiences here.

How have your classes been for you?

What are some of your good or bad experiences you may have had in class?

How would you describe your academic comfort level?

Comfort

Do you feel that you actually belong here at this university?

Now who contributes to your feeling of belonging here at Eastern or not belonging here?

What about the university faculty or staff?

Does the faculty make you feel like you belong here?

What about your peers?

Can you tell me about any obstacles or hurdles you have had to overcome just to survive here?

Are there any things that you are doing to try to overcome these obstacles?

Ending Questions and Conclusion

Why do you think black males are able to stay in college or why they tend to drop out?

How does these issues relate to your college experience?

Are there any other issues you might want to talk about?